



On your marks

For Christians, following Jesus is sometimes compared to setting out on a journey or embarking on a race through life. The following reflective story uses five rings (like those of the Olympic flag) to explore five stages of the Christian race of faith, relating these to what it means for those who compete in sports events.

Get set

You will need:

1. Your own home-made version of the Olympic flag with its five rings - or you could use five plastic PE rings in blue, yellow, black, green and red on a white base cloth. (NB: You may have to create a black ring by winding black tape around one of the rings.)
2. Five symbols for the following five stages of a sports event:
 - Joining the team - a water bottle or team top
 - Keeping on track - a whistle
 - Not giving up - a sweat band
 - Working together - a relay baton
 - Winning the race - a medal (you can buy a pack of replica medals in a pound shop)
3. Five additional sets of symbols for the following five stages of the journey of faith:
 - Becoming a follower of Jesus - water for baptism and a baptismal candle
 - Following instructions - an open Bible
 - Keeping one's eyes on Jesus - a cross
 - Being supported by others - a circle of people holding arms or another symbol of the fellowship of believers
 - Winning the prize of eternal life - lots of medals because everyone can be a winner, or alternatively a crown

In the style of a Godly Play reflective story, the objects should be placed down slowly as the story is told, from the storyteller's right to his or her left, and focusing on the objects, not the audience.

Go!

Gather your audience in a semi-circle around one side of an open space. The storyteller should be on the opposite side of this space, which should be large enough to contain the flag or rings when they are put down. Use the following opening questions to introduce the story:

- What's the biggest sports event you have ever seen? (Think back to any special events you may have attended or seen on TV.)
- What's the biggest sports event you have ever taken part in? (Think back to a school sports



day, or a family fun day, or games on holiday or at a camp.)

- What sort of event was it?
- What was the best part of that event?
- And what's the best prize you have ever won at anything?
- What was it?
- How special is it?

Let this conversation run its course and then continue.

Well, some sports occasions are really very big, like the Olympics (*or another major contemporary sporting event*). But do you know that there is one race that is the biggest race ever? And that anybody and everybody can be part of this great race? Let me tell you about this race.

Put down the flag, or the five overlapping rings - blue, yellow, black, green and red from right to left from the storyteller's perspective - as you say the following.

Running any race is of course hard work. And it's not just about the race on the day - there's all the planning and preparation; the training and the teamwork. Races aren't really only won by those who come first. It involves lots of people - even you and me, who cheer on the competitors from the grandstand.

Once there was a follower of Jesus called Paul. In his travels, he had seen many Olympic-style races: he had seen winners and losers; he had watched athletes train and seen how they had to compete according to the rules. Paul thought that this was like the great race someone is on when they become a Christian. It's a long distance race - a great journey that takes a lifetime. It's the biggest race ever.

Place a water bottle or team top in the blue circle.

It is a race that starts when you're chosen for the team. And in this great race Jesus invites his friends to follow him and start a journey of faith. Christians believe that Jesus still calls people to join his team - to be baptised with water...

Either point to the water bottle that's already there or place one down in the blue circle.

... and to follow the light of Jesus on a lifelong journey.

Place a baptismal candle in the blue circle.

Pause for a moment.

And it's a journey that, like a race, has rules to help competitors know what to do.

Place a whistle down in the yellow circle.



For Christians on the great race, the rules are found in the Christian's special book, the Bible.

Place an open Bible down in the yellow circle.

It has rules that show people how to love God, love themselves and love other people. And stories that help the followers of Jesus to run and not get tired; to walk and not faint (as one writer puts it).

Pause for a moment.

But it can be a hard journey and an exhausting race.

Place a sweat band down in the black circle.

Yet, it's a journey that Jesus has already run. He has gone ahead to show Christians the way to go. And Christians try and fix their eyes on his example...

Place a cross down in the black circle.

... so that they can keep going. And Jesus promises his followers that he will be with the first and with the last of them, because they are all important to him.

Pause for a moment.

And it's a race that isn't run alone. It's a team event.

Place a relay baton down in the green circle.

And the followers of Jesus in the great race need each other to be a winning team... like a body whose parts all work properly; everyone needs to work together so that they can all reach the finishing line.

Place a symbol of partnership/working together down in the green circle.

Christians believe that the people of God as a church are a team that can help to keep everyone on the journey.

Pause for a moment.

In an ordinary race, there is only one winner or winning team.

Place a medal down in the red circle.

But in the great race of faith, everyone can be a winner.

Place more medals down in the red circle.



For Christians, it's a journey that starts in this world and reaches the finishing line in heaven! There is a crown of life for all; a crown that will last for ever.

Pause for a moment, looking back over the five rings and the symbols.

Christians believe that following Jesus is like running a great race; a long-distance race, which is the journey of faith.

- I wonder which part of this great race you like the best.
- I wonder which part of this great race is the hardest.
- I wonder which part of this great race is the most important.
- I wonder what will keep you running the race.
- I wonder which part of this great race is special for you at the moment.
- I wonder if there is any part of this great race that you can leave out.
- I wonder what it will be like to finish this race one day.